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ABSTRACT

Shared reading involves reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy. Shared reading experience simulates the bedtime reading experience. It is a happy, secure situation that invites participation by children. Shared reading materials often use enlarged print which allows every child to see the story as it is being read. The highly predictable print and lively language invite the children to read along. Another aspect to shared reading is the shared inquiry method of learning--a distinctive method of learning in which students search for answers to fundamental questions raised by a text. There are many ways that teachers can help children to develop phonics knowledge through shared reading. Another outgrowth of the shared reading experience could involve integrating mathematics into a lesson. Students not only learn to read, they also develop a love for reading and become life-long readers through the process of a shared book experience. (Contains seven references.) (RS)

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How Shared Reading Experiences Help Children Develop Knowledge of Phonics

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The issue of the most effective way to teach children how to read has always been a hot topic of discussion. However, there has never been any evidence that shared reading, a process that involves cooperation between the teacher and the students, has negative effects on students becoming emergent readers. Shared reading involves reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy. By exposing children to a variety of shared reading experiences, they develop knowledge of phonics while engaging in educational literature.

Shared reading experiences simulate the bedtime reading experience. It is a happy, secure situation that invites participation by the children and instills the belief – "I am a reader." Shared reading materials often use enlarged print which allows every child to see the story as it is being read. The highly predictable print and lively language invite the children to read along. During shared reading, the teacher models strategies used by proficient readers. The teacher may invite the children to make predictions about the reading material based on their personal experiences, knowledge of the author, book jacket and picture clues (Ontario, 1992).

During reading, the teacher points to each word, constantly directing the children's attention to the print while modeling fluent and expressive reading. The teacher encourages the children to predict upcoming events in the stories. Discussion during and after reading may focus on story elements such as setting, characters, and plot. Charts and word lists developed with the children from shared reading experiences extend vocabulary and provide correct spelling models. The children are encouraged to include these words in their personal writing. The Freedom Party of Ontario (1992) also explains that re-reading of favorite stories during shared reading and at the listening center provides repetition which continually extends sight vocabulary. Favorite stories may be altered to provide further reading material.

Another aspect to shared reading is the shared inquiry method of learning. The Great Books Foundation has adopted programs with goals of instilling in adults and children the habits of mind that characterize a self-reliant thinker, reader, and learner (Great Books, 1997). Shared inquiry is a distinctive method of learning in which students search for answers to fundamental questions raised by a text. This search is inherently active; it involves taking what the author has written and grasping its full meaning.

The article written by the Great Books Foundation (1997) provides valuable insight to the interesting idea of shared inquiry. The success of the program depends on a special relationship between the teacher and the

students. The teacher is there to guide students in reaching their own interpretations of the text. They do this by posing thought-provoking questions and by following up purposefully on what students say. By doing this, the teacher helps them develop both the flexibility of mind to consider problems from many angles, and the discipline to analyze ideas critically (Great Books, 1997).

There are many ways that teachers can help children to develop phonics knowledge through shared reading. "Having familiar and favorite stories (poems, rhymes, etc.) read to them again and again, during a shared reading experience wherein they can see the text and see the teacher point to words as they are spoken is extremely effective (Holdaway, 1979)." This process facilitates the learning of words and of letter/sound patterns, as well as an understanding of print and how it is read in English. By discussing letter/sound relationships in the context of authentic reading selections, teachers can facilitate such discussion within the shared reading experience by using big books that all the children can see. Alphabet books also invite the discussion of letter/sound relationships. By engaging in activities that reinforce letter/sound relationships, as an outgrowth of the shared reading experience, children might make charts of words exhibiting letter/sound patterns of particular interest to them. After two or more charts have been compiled, children could make related graphs comparing appropriate data (Whiten et al, 1990).

Mills (1992) also suggests discussing interesting patterns of onsets and rhymes in the context of shared reading experiences. Among the stories, poems, rhymes, and songs chosen to share with children should be some that emphasize alliteration and rhyme. One of the best ways to generate childrens' interest in the sound elements of a selection may be to ask simply, "What do you notice about this poem?" or, more specifically, "What do you notice about the sound in this poem? Although children may notice different sound elements than the teacher anticipated, this procedure gives children ownership over their own learning.

Another outgrowth of the shared reading experience could involve integrating mathematics into a lesson. The class can make charts that list words with particular sound patterns, and graphs based upon the charts. For example, the teacher might chart all the "sl-" and "sp-" and "st-" words in several poems, then make a class graph showing the relative frequency of the words in each list. Children may especially enjoy collaborating in such activities and may even want to create their own alphabet books. There are various phonics-enhancing activities that can stem from and enhance enjoyment of literature, as well as activities involving children's names (Mills et al, 1992).

Mills (1992) discusses many ways teachers can emphasize the use of letter/sound cues along with prior knowledge and context. They can begin by modeling how they themselves use meaning and grammar along with initial

letters to predict what a word might mean. They can also encourage children again and again to think, "what would make sense here" before trying to sound out a word. Another idea is to engage the students in close oral activities based on their shared readings and discuss in literature groups, how children dealt with problem words. It is critical to help children develop and use letter/sound knowledge in the context of constructing meaning from texts.

Freppon (1991) suggests that teachers foster the acquisition of phonics knowledge indirectly, through various means. They can provide small, multiple copies of many selections so that children can easily reread favorite stories, songs, and poems. Teachers may provide tapes of many selections for children to listen to as they follow along with written text. They may also point to words during shared reading experiences with big books and charts. One significant idea was for teachers to provide additional materials and help for individual children, as appropriate. For instance, children who seem ready to grasp the concept of letter/sound relationships might especially benefit from Dr. Seuss books that reinforce letter/sound patterns. Children who are slow in grasping letter/sound relationships may benefit from tutorial assistance. It is extremely important to pay attention to children's individual needs.

"Having teachers and students read together encourages classroom discussion, models appropriate reading behavior and pronunciation, and encourages children to think about the book or story" (Mooney, 1994). Higgins

and Roos (1990) suggest that literature has a positive effect on both reading achievement and attitude towards reading. They explain that children of all ability levels, given the opportunity to experience reading as a visual and thought process, take a more active role in their own learning. Students not only learn to read, they also develop a love for reading and become life-long readers through the process of a shared book experience. As a teacher, my goal will be to create the right learning environment in which natural intimacy between me and my students develops, and reading becomes pleasurable and enjoyable. I will do my best to encourage the learning of phonics through a wide variety of shared reading experiences.

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